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# Looking at the Onlookers:The Attitudes of Women's WWI Poetry

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# **Looking at the Onlookers: The Attitudes of Women's WWI Poetry**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in the  
Department of Literature and Philosophy.

By  
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Under the mentorship of Joe Pellegrino

## **ABSTRACT**

The poems concerning WWI written by women reflect different attitudes about the concept of war and can be grouped into categories based on their stances toward the Great War. The most familiar feminine voice in the poetry of WWI illuminated a nationalistic and glorified view of war, where fighting (and dying) for a just cause outweighs any possible loss of life or limb. Running counter to this sentiment is a strain of poetry that calls into question the jingoistic and ill-informed opinions of the former group. Alongside these antipathetic groups there was a third, more meliorated, set of voices. These women took on active roles in the war industry, and wrote about how their occupations affected their views on war. A careful consideration of the depth and diversity of not just feelings, but intellectual positions, on the war seen in these poems will inevitably lead us to the conclusion that female poetry written during this time deserves the same recognition and attention given to WWI poetry written by men.

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### **Looking at the Onlookers: The Attitudes of Women's WWI Poetry**

The First World War engaged the participation and involvement of almost every citizen of the Allied and Associated Powers, which included both Great Britain and the United States. Each person had a different role and thus, a different perspective on the war. Women were not yet permitted to be soldiers in combat, but they submerged themselves into other duties as nurses, ammunition producers, or simply, housemakers and mothers forced to function without the aid of their partners, children, or parent. Many of these women expressed their attitudes toward the war in poetry. However, the female poetic voices of World War One were often neglected and overlooked, especially when compared to the poetry of their male counterparts.

The poems concerning WWI written by women reflect different attitudes about the concept of war and can be grouped into categories based on their stances toward the Great War. If current readers think about women's poetry of WWI at all, many of them dismiss it as a collection of mere letters and confessions of love, anxiety, and separation regarding their husbands in war. But this unfair summation does not fully capture the wide range of voices used by female poets at that time. Other women wrote poems that offer deeper intellectual, affective, political, and moral reflections on the nature of war itself. We may illustrate the multiple tonalities and nuanced positions that they expressed by comparing a number of oppositional views expressed in their poetry.

The most familiar feminine voice in the poetry of WWI illuminated a nationalistic and glorified view of war, where fighting (and dying) for a just cause outweighs any possible loss of life or limb. Running counter to this sentiment is a strain of poetry that calls into question the jingoistic and ill-informed opinions of the former group. These

poets knew that nothing about war is glorious; it is a battlefield of bloodshed and forgotten faces. Alongside these antipathetic groups there was a third, more meliorated, set of voices. These women took on active roles in the war industry, and wrote about how their occupations affected their views of war. Maria Geiger explains that “the war offered aspiring women writers the opportunity to write and publish; it created the conditions for women poets to speak to the nation in a public mode” (3). A careful consideration of the depth and diversity of not just feelings, but intellectual positions, on the war seen in these poems will inevitably lead us to the conclusion that female poetry written during this time deserves the same recognition and attention given to WWI poetry written by men.

No matter their feelings about the war, these women did not write in a vacuum. The culture in which they lived, in their particular historical moments, positioned the cataclysm of war itself as something both necessary and just. While we may like to think that poetry is so culturally significant that it alone may influence the attitudes and mores of a nation, we must realize that other, far more pervasive and penetrative forms of media carry far more sway with any particular culture, be it high, low, or popular.

The First World War recruited millions of individuals into the infantry, but with the only draft being used in Great Britain, one might wonder what could encourage so many



Figure 1

people to risk their life for the cause of war. Across the world, countries used propaganda posters to encourage men to leave their families and safety on the home front to take a chance at glory on the battlefield. While thousands of posters were created for this purpose, the ones that seem to be the most renowned and effective are the ones that establish the man not as a soldier, but as a husband, father, and son with a responsibility to his family and country. For example, in one British recruiting poster (see Figure 1), two women and a young boy are gazing out the window of their luxurious home into the distance, where men dressed in uniforms are marching with their rifles. The poster displays the phrase, “Women of Britain say—’Go’!” (Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, 1914). The women appear to be in despair at their loved ones leaving, but the tone of the phrase suggests that the women are encouraging and confident in the choice to send their husbands and sons to war.

A pure example of emotional blackmail, the second poster (see Figure 2) shows two children sitting with their father after the war, and the daughter shows curiosity about her father’s involvement in the war. The young girl sits on her father’s lap, pointing to a picture of a starburst shell in a book about war. She asks a question that forces her father to reconsider his choices about the war—“Daddy, what did YOU do in the Great War?”—while her brother kneels



Figure 2

on the floor, playing with toy soldiers. The father gazes directly at the viewer, breaking the fourth wall of the image, his face full of regret for his non-participation. The implication of his stare out of the frame is that every father who sees this does not want to be in this man's position (British Library, 1914-1915). So both wives and children are used to manipulate men into the fight. Essentially, this poster predicts a future where the very war that is occurring outside the comfortable home of this family will be included in primary school textbooks and popularize toys that inspire little boys to be soldiers when they grow up. Thus, if the father wants a reason for his children to be proud of him, he better join the war.

A third poster (see Figure 3) uses a generic saint-like figure to recruit. In this Irish propaganda poster, the position of the woman in front of a white circular inset makes her look like she has a halo (Imperial War Museums, 1915). The poster asks, "Have you any women-folk worth defending?"

The woman's age is indeterminate; she could be a mother, a wife, a sister, or even a daughter. She does not appeal to the lusty desires of men (as many other posters did), but, like the daughter in Figure 2, she causes every viewer to question just how much he values the women in his life. She is a mother telling her son to treat women with respect. She is a wife reminding her husband



Figure 3

that she is depending on him. She is a sister or a daughter whose angelic pose prompts the viewer to recall that it is his masculine obligation to protect the women in his life from the dangers and atrocities of war.

This poster also contains the phrase, “Remember the women of Belgium.” All viewers of the time would recall what was more commonly known as “The Rape of Belgium”: the atrocities and war crimes committed by the German army on Belgian non-combatants during the invasion and subsequent occupation of Belgium. As a result, a man viewing this poster was forced to think about the women in his own life who may not encourage him through a sexual appeal, but rather by reminding him that, as a gender, they are defenseless, and their honor needs his protection.

The connective tissue for all these propaganda posters is the woman who acts as an encouragement or stimulus for men to leave their homes and risk their lives in battle. The culture of the day was saturated with these images, all playing upon gender to increase the number of recruits. Their presentations of women were monolithic: all women approved of the just cause; all women used the promise of adulation to get men to enlist, and all women needed protecting.

These propaganda posters not only persuaded men to join the military, but the visual depictions in them offered a sense of what the men should expect in war. Essentially, the shiny helmets and the patriotically-colored uniforms showed those thinking about joining the war effort that they were joining a worthy cause. Like posters, poetry was used as a propaganda tool as well, much of which aimed to convey the same message. Male poets often viewed the war with a glossy vision, summarizing and valorizing the war without ever experiencing loss, separation, or combat themselves.



Laurence Binyon, in his “For the Fallen,” explains how a country that loses soldiers in war is similar to a mother who loses her children. Instead of this mother figure responding with anger or melancholy, the speaker describes how England is proud of her sons for sacrificing their lives to fulfill their duty as both men and citizens. Binyon writes,

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;  
 They sit not more at familiar tables of home;  
 They have no lot in our labor of the day-time;  
 They sleep beyond England’s foam. (17-20)

Essentially, Binyon mentions the negative aspects of war first, as if reminding his audience that the men are dead, yet he finishes the poem by suggesting that perhaps it is better that they are dead because they have given their lives to preserve a legacy their country both values and is willing to expend lives to defend:

But where our desires are and our hopes are profound,  
 Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,  
 To the innermost heart of their own land they are known  
 As the stars are known to the Night; (21-24)

By the end of the poem, the dead have become a part of England’s history, where they will never die, but live forever. Binyon and many others looked at war as an opportunity to do something memorable for one’s country. By dying in battle, a soldier would gain recognition for his service by becoming embedded into the nation’s history. It is most ironic, however, that Binyon would liken the feelings of loss that a mother has when her child dies to how a country feels when “she” loses her citizens in war. The fact that

Binyon is a male and has never or will never experience how it feels to be a mother who loses a child denies him the right to comment on how that loss must feel. Ultimately, many men and quite possibly women, looked at war in the same way: soldiers were offerings to the country represented as a larger entity.

Propaganda posters and poetry written by men who have not individually experienced the themes discussed in the poem were two popular mediums that illustrated the attitudes of voluntary enjoinment in the war. However, as ubiquitous and influential as they were, propaganda posters such as these did not reflect the attitudes of all women. Many were not so eager to let their husbands walk out of their homes and families to join a worldwide battle full of bloodshed, and much of the war poetry written by women reflects this hesitant attitude. Unlike the posters, contemporary poetry did not have a significant level of penetration into the popular culture at the time. Research shows that “Women wrote over a quarter of the poetry printed during the war, more, that is, than the soldier-poets,” yet within “the canon of war poetry, however, women’s poetry remains largely invisible even after a sustained effort by feminist critics to recuperate this *oeuvre*” (Buck 434). Although poems were published in newspapers and gazettes, and thus the “typical” reader would be exposed to more poetry than a typical 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader, the popularity of poetry certainly did not rival that of the recruitment posters.

Neglected from these two forums was the woman’s voice. Rather than just an attractive blonde-haired woman waving her husband goodbye as he leaves the home, actual women living through this period of war had their own ideas about the war. However, these individual responses were often not the first to be read. Back then and even today, woman’s war poetry that discussed love, separation, and anxiety about the

men in their lives leaving the home front was the genre that people picked up and read if they picked up anything at all. Primarily serving as a temporary band-aid, women at home wanted to know that they were not the only ones feeling lonely and anxious about the absence of their husband, son, or brother. They wanted to read about both hope and reality as each day passed by without knowing their loved one's status of life.

Some poems, however, were not about waiting to know if a father or brother has been killed, but finding out he has been and responding to that loss. One of the most known poems written by a woman during WWI is Vera Brittain's "Perhaps—(To R.A.L.)." Written about the passing of her fiancé Roland Leighton, the narrator wonders if she will ever see the world in the same way now that her fiancé will never become her husband. Brittain writes,

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,  
 And I shall see that still the skies are blue,  
 And feel once more I do not live in vain.  
 Although bereft of You. (1-4)

The word "perhaps" implies an in-between position between a positive yes and a negative no. Each of her five stanzas, except for the final stanza, begins with this very word demonstrating that each time a new situation or experience occurs in her life, she is not confident that she will have a positive response to it. Her first line shows her lack of confidence that the sun will shine again. Yet, the sun shines every day and rather than her knowing the objective fact of the sun's routine movements, she demonstrates her sadness over her fiancé's death by explaining how the sun might as well not shine ever again because she does not perceive the lifted energy that is represented by the sun's light. The

same reasoning can be given to her not being able to see the sky as blue now that her lover is dead. The speaker demonstrates through her altered vision that once someone important in an individual's life dies, the world is forever changed. Given, the sun is still going to rise, the skies are still going to be blue, and all of the world's systematic actions are going to continue with an indifference over one person's loss of life, but it is the individual's outlook on the world that changes because of that one death. She adds to the stanza that maybe a day will come where she does not feel like she is living in vain (3). The most probable reason that the speaker feels as if she is living in vain is in the fact that she is alive and he is not. She stayed in the comforts of her home while a massive war was going on and let her fiancé walk out the door to fight knowing the risks that he could endure. The speaker feels a survivor's guilt that suggests that maybe had she done something to prevent him from going to war, he would still be alive and she could live her life with a clean conscious.

The poem not only describes her transformed perception of the world, but it also shows the long-lasting influence his death will have on her. Similar to Binyon's "For the Fallen," the speaker believes that a death due to war has a greater impact than a death from a natural cause because the strings of honor, legacy, and sacrificing for a greater cause are always attached when referring to war casualties. Brittain explains in her last stanza just how permanent his death is:

But though kind Time may many joys renew,  
 There is one greatest joy I shall not know  
 Again, because my heart for loss of You  
 Was broken, long ago. (20-24).

The notion that time is the best healer can be applied to many of her issues that she mentioned above. Perhaps, after enough time has passed, she will see the sky as blue (2), find the flowers to be sweet (7), and be able to listen to Christmas songs (15). However, she will never again get to experience the intimate and affectionate love of being with Leighton again. That right, or “joy” as she refers to it, has been stripped away from her. She capitalizes “Time” to show just how much power it has in healing the hearts of those who have lost loved ones and pushing the survivors to be optimistic for a better day in the future. Counteractively, Brittain also capitalizes “You” which refers to her dead fiancé to demonstrate that he has just as much power in rejecting that optimistic future. Brittain explains how she will never experience her greatest joy because her heart was “broken, long ago” (20). She emphasizes that she has been feeling this sadness and depression over her fiancé’s death for a long time now. It is not a recent loss that she is trying to overcome, but rather one that has affected her for a long time now. Her heart is not just hurt, but broken, a term that implies an irreversible damage. For as long as she lives, she will have this weight of regret, pessimism, and uncertainty on her being. The last stanza of the poem suggests that maybe the “Perhaps” is to be viewed more as an improbable response to her healing rather than an optimistic and hopeful outlook for a better day. Essentially, the Great War is to be blamed for not only her fiancé’s death, but also for her weakened ability to ever see the world as a place of love, hope, and joy again.

In addition to Brittain’s testament of loss after the death of her husband, female poet Majorie Wilson offers her response when her husband and the father of her three year old son dies in WWI. The speaker of the poem is most likely the mother who is telling her son, Tony, that his father has died, but that his death is worth something

nonetheless. The speaker begins by comparing the father to the son saying, “There was a man once loved green fields like you” (5). The fact that the speaker explains to her son that there was once a man most likely means that the death of the father has occurred after a good many of months and possibly up to three years ago. Therefore, the mother has had more time to cope with the loss. She is not angry at the war or bitter about his dying in battle. She describes her partner in positive terms, explaining how,

He was a dreamer and a poet, and brave

To face and hold what he alone found true.

He was a comrade of the old – a friend

To every little laughing child like you. (13-16)

Again, the father is connected to the child. In this way, however, Wilson is showing the innocence of the husband. He was a man who dreamed, who stood up for what he believed in, and who was a friend to even the young children.

The imagery in this poem is also very bright. Wilson describes how the world is “gemmed with daisies,” (1) the father is “brother to her sunlight,” (10) and he is a friend to every “laughing child” (15). However, in the fifth stanza, the light imagery changes. Wilson describes: “And when across the peaceful English land, / Unhurt by war, the light is growing dim, / And you remember by your shadowed bed / All those – the brave – you must remember him” (17-20). The speaker shifts purpose here. In the first four stanzas, the mother is describing Tony’s father and what a great and brave man he was. Now, her tone is more serious because she is explaining to her son that *because* he was such a great and brave man, he deserves to be remembered. The purpose of the poem is not to bash

the soldier or the cause he died fighting for, but rather to remember the father who risked his life for a cause much larger than himself.

While the poem begins lightheartedly by describing Tony's father before he died, the final stanza demonstrates the speaker's goal in talking to her son. She says to Tony:

And know it was for you who bear his name

And such as you that all his joy he gave –

His love of quiet fields, his youth, his life,

To win that heritage of peace you have. (21-24)

The speaker urges her son to understand that his father who does not have the chance to watch his son grow up and share in the hobbies they both enjoy, would not be upset that he died. She explains that he died in order to secure a safe environment for Tony to grow up in, so that he could live to do all of the things that would make him happy. Overall, the poem is neither pro-war or anti-war. Instead, it is a raw testimony of how families are forever changed when a family member dies in the war. This testament of loss, yet also love shows how many families, especially wives and mothers, felt about the war. Over time, as in Wilson's poem, many learned how to cope with the grief and instead find a way to tell their children, in a positive manner, about the greatness of the fallen.

These types of poems, exemplified by Brittain's "Perhaps" and Wilson's "To Tony (Age 3)," would have been the commonly read poems both during and after the war ended. The poems tended to fulfill the standard expectations of female sentiment. In many people's minds, women were not capable, or permissible, to have opinions that took a stance on political concepts. Even now, when looking into the poetry of WWI, the works written by women are often limited to these poems of love, separation, and

anxiety. In fact, “feminist historiography has tended to present women, the majority of whom remained at home, as ‘other’ to war, even as they felt the effects of the loss of men at the front” (Bell 414). The women who stayed at home were not considered to be a part of the war because of their distance from actual combat. Despite being considered “other,” the women’s voices from the home front were just as important as those who fought in the trenches.

However, not all female poets focused on just the loss of a loved one. In fact, many took a nationalistic approach, in which they wrote about how the war gave men the chance to show pride for their home country as well as to die for a cause that was worthy of their sacrifice.

Famously known for her jingoistic poetry, Jessie Pope remains to this day one of the most well-known female poets of the first world war. Her poem, “Who’s for the Game?” glorifies the notion of war as it eagerly encourages young men to participate. The basis of her luring men into war is to question their masculinity. Pope writes, “Who’ll grip and tackle the job unafraid? / And who thinks he’d rather sit tight?” (3-4). As seen in the messages of the propaganda posters, there exists the notion that masculine and brave men go off to fight in the war while those who sit at home and avoid participating themselves in the war are weak, scared, and unmanly. Instead of completely ignoring the fact that war is harsh and risky, Pope asks, “Who knows it won’t be a picnic – not much– / Yet eagerly shoulders a gun?” (9-10). The poem tells the war prospects that war will not be a picnic, however, her language implies that war is going to be a good time. She begins by likening the war to a “game, the biggest that’s played” (1). A game, as many would understand, is a friendly competition where one team or player



comes out the winner and the other the loser, but no lives are brutally lost. Pope's use of the term "game" implies that boys can join the war without being hurt because it is a competition that they do not want to miss out on. Pope then asks, "Who would much rather come back with a crutch / Than lie low and be out of the fun?" (11-12). Pope again uses her language to sway her readers to join the war while lacking the foundational knowledge of what war is really like. It is highly unlikely that any WWI veteran would attest to the fact that their service in the war was "fun." In fact, war is anything but fun.

While Pope encourages men to join the war by the same persuasion techniques of the propaganda posters, namely questioning the masculinity of the men, she also uses a nationalistic approach. She asks, "Who'll give his country a hand," (6) implying that it is not the overall cause of the war that men should sacrifice their safety to participate in a greater cause, but rather, it is the country that is worth promoting. Regardless of the reasons for WWI, Pope encourages the men to make the sacrifice in order to represent their nation. Pope ends the poem explaining, "For there's only one course to pursue, / Your country is up to her neck in a fight, / And she's looking and calling for you." (15-17). Similar to the propaganda posters of the time, Pope's language encourages men to go save the damsel in distress, the damsel being the country. Had the pronouns been masculine, I do not think the message would have come across as urgent or important. Because the country is portrayed as female, the nationalistic ploy is all the more effective. What man would ignore both the opportunity to save his country and the distressed female who is calling out to him for help?

Thus, Pope's poem serves as an influential poem because it suggested to men that war is a game that is meant to be played by strong, brave men. Those who sat on the

sidelines were weak and unworthy of glory. Not only did Pope test the male reader's masculinity but she also convinced the men to join in order to help and save their country. This nationalistic approach is all the more convincing when Pope creates the country as a female in search of male aid. It is clear to see how Pope's jingoistic language is seen as absurd by today's readers who know the brutality of war. Pope had never experienced the extreme conditions of war, and while some might judge her for likening the war that took millions of lives to a trivial game, her poem no doubt effectively convinced many to sacrifice their lives and fight for their country.

Pope was not the only female who suggested that men are just pawn pieces in the overall game of war. Many women at the time voiced their view of war as an opportunity to represent and support the fight of their country. It was both a chance to be patriotic and glorious. In Muriel Stuart's "Forgotten Dead, I Salute You," the concept of sacrifices is elevated to a much higher level. Stuart begins by setting up the contrast between nature and man. Stuart describes many of nature's attributes such as how the "Birds in the hawthorn build again; / The hare makes soft her secret house / The wind at tourney comes and goes, / Spurring the green, unharnessed boughs" (9-12), then introduces an unnamed man saying, "He knew the beauty of all those / Last year, and who remembers him?" (14-15). The poet is suggesting that the man was very aware of all aspects of the natural world because he was alive to notice them. However, now that he is dead, no one remembers him in the same manner. The enjambment from the thirteenth line into the fourteenth line emphasizes just how much time was needed for people to forget about the man's life – just one year.

The poem seems to have a negative attitude towards war when Stuart continues to emphasize how no one remembers the man once he has died. Stuart begins the third stanza stating: “None remember him: he lies / In earth of some strange-sounding place, / Nameless beneath the nameless skies” (25-27). The first half of the stanza would certainly deter any man from joining the war just on the insinuation that once he dies, he will be just a nameless body in a world that will move on without remembering him or his sacrifice. However, Stuart shifts her tone in the second half of the poem explaining,

Yet such as he  
Have made it possible and sure  
For other lives to have, to be;  
For men to sleep content, secure. (31-34)

Stuart pulls in the nationalistic strategy to convince men to enlist by explaining the worth of their sacrifice. Because one man dies in war, another man is able to sleep peacefully and safely in their home. The poem suggests that dying for one’s country is an unselfish act of love. Therefore, while Stuart suggests that a soldier might die and fade from the memory of those who survive him, his act of sacrifice will not be fruitless, but will instead allow others to live on his behalf.

Not only does the poem’s message use nationalistic language, but it also uses religious language. In the final stanza of the poem, Stuart makes the grandest comparison of all. She compares the fatal sacrifice of the fallen soldier to the very crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Stuart explains, “He gave, as Christ, the life he had” (39). Essentially, the soldier’s decision to leave his home of safety and then lose his life in war is equivalent to Jesus Christ leaving heaven to take the body of man, enduring persecution on Earth, and

then being crucified by the people He tried to save. When it comes to making the decision to join the war or not to join the way, Stuart's comparison to Jesus's unfair treatment seems to outweigh the thought of being forgotten by the world. After all, Jesus rose again and returned to Heaven where He is praised and known by all.

Stuart ends the poem with an attempt to reverse her initial innuendo that the fallen man is soon forgotten. Again, Stuart compares the dead soldier to Jesus Christ saying,

There was his body broken for you,

There was his blood divinely shed

That in the earth lie lost and dim.

Eat, drink, and often as you do,

For whom he died, remember him. (44-47)

The language of the final stanza mirrors the biblical passage of Jesus at the Last Supper.

Luke 22:19-20 states, "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Holy Bible KJV). In the same way that Jesus encourages His men to remember Him after he has died, the poet is encouraging readers to do the same for the fallen soldier. Stuart is suggesting that in the same way Jesus sacrificed His body and blood for all of humanity, so is the soldier sacrificing his body and blood so that the living can live. According to Stuart, it is only right and fitting that the reader remembers the soldier who died for him or her in the same way a sinner must remember the Savior.

Stuart's poem begins with the truth that the soldier might die, and if so, will likely be forgotten within little time, yet by the end of the poem, Stuart has created a strong

argument for why death is no match for the gift of peace and security that the soldier provides. Stuart's "Forgotten Dead, I Salute You" encourages men to fight for the war using both patriotic and religious techniques. The soldier might lose his life, but he is making a sacrifice for others to live a safe life. Stuart heightens this nationalistic approach by comparing the soldier's sacrifice to the sacrifice Jesus made not for just one country, but for the whole world.

The majority of the world in 1914 had never experienced any war comparable to the magnitude of WWI. Therefore, it was difficult to predict just how lethal and destructive the war would have ever been. The utilization of propaganda posters and literature convinced men across the world that the war was an opportunity to represent their country and to defend the innocent lives around the globe. Stuart and Pope's nationalistic pro-war poems reflect the naive attitudes of WWI as they fail to show just how awful war is by covering the truth with the benefits and rewards that war provides the soldier. While not every female encouraged men to fight in the war, many women played along with the theme of the propaganda posters by encouraging men to both protect them at home and defend the country as a whole.

On the other hand, much of the war poetry written by women saw war for what it was: not a sugarcoated game of fun, but rather a cruel and lethal event. Unlike current day media, the early twentieth century lacked a broad spectrum of showing people who stayed at home, namely women, what occurred on the battlefield. Small theaters might show reels of footage, but for the most part, women waited at home with little information about what was occurring on the other side of safety. What little information women did know about war was gained via handwritten letters from their loved ones,

word of mouth from others, or experiencing the war on the sidelines such as in hospitals or ammunition factories. Given this exposure to the truth, it is clear why some poets such as Katherine Tynan and Charlotte Mew would produce poetry that exposes the brutality of war and the lies that so many soldiers were told before enlisting.

The poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est” is one of the quintessential poems of anti-war literature. Written by Wilfred Owen, an active soldier who was killed in action in 1918, the poet experienced the realities of war. From disease to death to depression, Owen exposed the pacified versions of war literature. In “Dulce Et Decorum Est,” Owen writes about the experience of his fellow soldiers, describing,

Many had lost their boots,  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots  
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind. (5-8)

Compared to Pope’s poem labeling the war as a “game,” Owen’s description is far from a friendly and enjoyable game. Owen’s particular use of the word “all” demonstrates the universal fate for soldiers. Owen explains how all of the men are predicted to become lame and blind. It is true that not every soldier became disabled or lost their sight following their service, but all soldiers did become disabled whether that was visible from an outward appearance or not. Not one man would leave the battlefield the same way that he entered, emotionally or psychologically.

Illustrated in just a few lines, Owen creates an image that changed many of the perspectives of home readers. Using four out of five senses, Owen brings the reader to the trenches. He incorporates the sensory of touching or feeling when he describes how a

man would become lame and lose the mobility they once possessed. The soldiers are then described as becoming blind, the visual sense, which demonstrates the use and power of poisonous gas used during the war. The line “drunk with fatigue” plays on taste and convinces readers of the extreme exhaustion soldiers endured. There was no time to sleep in peace and safety like those at home because for a soldier, every minute on the battlefield was a minute that his life was at risk. The last sense that Owen brings into the first stanza is sound. Owen explains how to soldiers, the sound of gas-shells becomes familiar and eventually fades to background sound. The soldier’s immunity to war has caused death to become silent. Incorporating the senses into the imagery of the poem not only shows the magnitude of war, but it presents a convincing image for readers who may not have ever seen war to know what it is like without being there.

Owen offers more examples of the brutality and horridness of war in his poem, but the last four lines truly demonstrate the attitude towards war that Tynan and Mew would agree with. Owen writes that if the reader could experience all of the awful things of war that Owen himself has had to experience, then

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*

*Pro patria mori.* (25-28)

The Latin phrase ending the poem translates to “It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country.” Owen’s poem can be seen as a response to the poetry of Pope which invites men to enter the war based on the promise that they will receive some type of glory for their sacrifices. Owen paints the exact opposite picture that Pope creates and his main

reason for the difference in opinions is simply experience. Owen can stand by his account of war because he has actually been there and seen it with his own eyes, while Pope is only creating a glorified version of war based on the ideas of war—primarily those promoted by propaganda posters. Rejecting the glorified accounts of war, “Dulce Et Decorum Est” serves as a representative for anti-war poetry.

Owen is, however, only one point of view in the sub-genre of anti-war literature. He is a male poet who served on the battlefield where women were not present. Katherine Tynan was an established female poet and novelist of the time. She had never set foot on a battlefield or aided in the WWI effort. However, her poetry shows her to be knowledgeable in the realities of war. Tynan’s poem “Joining the Colours” appears to have the cheerful tone and diction of Pope’s pro-war poetry, but the message of the poem is clearly anti-war as she discusses the complications of going to war for glory. Tynan opens the poem with the departure of young men ready for war. She describes,

There they go marching all in step so gay!  
Smooth-cheeked and golden, food for shells and guns.  
Blithely they go as to a wedding day,  
The mothers’ sons. (1-4)

What first appears to be a positive scene of happiness and eagerness quickly is interrupted by blunt phrases. The boys’ faces are described as golden and their bodies all in sync as they march, but Tynan reminds the reader not to hold on to that image. Instead, these boys that appear in a glorified manner are in fact, “food for shells and guns” (2). Tynan’s forthright mention of the innocent boys’ ultimate deaths is both shocking and truthful. The audacity of Tynan to deliver such a crude message only intensifies as she



compares their joyful movements of marching to how they would walk to a wedding. The final punch of the stanza comes when she lists the boys as their “mothers’ sons” (4).

There is not a relationship as sacred and pure as a mother and a child. There is no doubt that many of the readers of Tynan’s poem would have been mothers whose sons were in the army. To read that their sons were targets of heavy artillery and lethal weapons would no doubt incite anxiety and fear. Despite the harshness of the message, Tynan’s poem was an attempt at keeping people from eagerly walking into the war without fully knowing the consequences of their involvement.

In the third stanza of Tynan’s poem, the men are not described as heroes but rather fools. Tynan warns,

With tin whistles, mouth organs, any noise,  
They pipe the way to glory and the grave;  
Foolish and young, the gay and golden boys  
Love cannot save. (9-12)

Similar to the first stanza, Tynan uses short blunt phrases to contradict the tone of happiness. She describes the scene as musical while the boys play their instruments in rows. However, Tynan explains that they are playing their instruments to glory and to the grave (2). There is no option as Tynan does not write to glory *or* to the grave. The term “and” implies that the boys are marching their way into war in an attempt to gain some type of glory, but they also are marching to their own death. Tynan uses the word to emphasize that there is no use for glory when the soldier has died. Death is inevitably a result of seeking glory in such a blood-spilling arena.

Not only does Tynan blatantly warn the boys of their upcoming death after joining the war, but she also labels them as foolish. Again describing the soldiers as “golden boys,” (11) Tynan acknowledges the glorified perception that very much existed in the time period, but undercuts that description by calling them foolish and then explaining that “love cannot save” them (12). Love is deemed to be a powerful force able to save the most broken of things and people. However, Tynan says that not even love could prevent these boys from coming back from the war happy, healthy, or even alive. The musical imagery serves as the background to the scene, one that illustrates a Jessie Pope attitude toward war. However, just two words, “grave” and “foolish,” overpower the entire message. No one cares about the music and the boys’ synced marching. When the lives of innocent boys are on the lines, everyone becomes aware.

The final stanza of the poem reintroduces the concept of love once more. In the first stanza of the poem, the love being discussed was that shared between a mother and her son. In the third stanza of the poem, Tynan reminds the reader that love cannot save the boys. In the final stanza, however, Tynan mentions a romantic love between the boys and the girls. Tynan explains,

High heart! High courage! The poor girls they kissed

Run with them – they shall kiss no more, alas!

Out of the mist they stepped-into the mist

Singing they pass. (13-16)

The first two lines of the stanza seem to offer words of affirmation. The boys do in fact have high hearts and high courage as they sacrifice their lives to WWI. However, just like in the third stanza, what Tynan says after the apparent positivity is more important and

negates the importance of the good. Instead of elaborating on their courage, Tynan explains how the girls that run alongside the boys are unfortunate as well. They are not aware that they will no longer get to kiss their significant other again. It is unlikely that their boys will even return. Yet, because the girls are happily sending them off, just like the girls in the propaganda posters who insisted that the men leave the household, they fail to understand the realistic consequences of war.

Ultimately, love is casted as the opposite of war in the poem. War is the villain who is dragging the men to their graves without putting up a fight against love. Love has no power when it comes to war. The love of a mother or the love of an infatuated girl, as powerful as it is, is not as powerful as war and death. The emphasis on the grim message of dying as it contrasts the imagery of young boys eager to make a difference in the world demonstrates the anti-war attitude a female possessed in the beginning of the global war. While women in propaganda posters were happily sending their husbands and brothers off to war, Tynan was not one of them as she believed the boys who joined the war were foolish for thinking war to be anything other than the massive killing it was.

Not only does Tynan's poem express the anti-war view, but Charlotte Mew's "The Cenotaph" also bluntly illustrates the realities of the fallen soldier and the people that recognize his death. Mew begins the poem explaining that war is not a temporary ordeal without long-lasting effects. She explains,

Not yet will those measureless fields be green again  
 Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth was shed;  
 There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too deep a stain,  
 Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we may tread. (1-4)

The first four lines illustrate the distinction between the living and the dead. The speaker comments on the sacrifice of the soldiers in a positive light: “the wild sweet blood of wonderful youth” (2). The beginning of the poem not only positively memorializes the lives lost and the sacredness of the fields in which their lives were lost, but it also suggests that the living have the opportunity to speak proudly about the fallen for as long as their memory lives on. Amy Helen Bell adds, that the memorial “because it is placed at home, which is the scene not of victory but of personal loss, stands as the recipient of ‘country’ gifts and the offerings of the bereaved women” (193). In many ways, the cenotaph is close enough to remind the women of their loss, but distant enough to help them forget the reality of how he died. The speaker’s tone depicts the respect and admiration one has for those who gave their lives in the name of war and the setting appears to positively memorialize the hometown lives that were lost in the war.

However, the message of the poem changes after the first four lines as the speaker then explains the attitudes that others, who might not possess so much respect and admiration for the dead, have as they pretentiously attempt to build cenotaphs to memorialize the soldiers’ sacrifice. Mew continues describing:

But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from the thrust of an inward sword

have more slowly bled,

We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the

column’s head.

And over the stairway, at the foot—oh! Here, leave desolate, passionate hands to

spread

Violets, roses, and laurel with the small sweet twinkling country things. (5-8)

The process of memorializing the dead described in the above lines appears to be an innocent way of monumentalizing their nation's lost lives. However, the diction of the lines illustrates a person who might be too enthusiastic over the building of the cenotaphs. The people described are eager to build a cenotaph not on the field where the men die, but in the communities where the living remain. Not only are they anxious to build in areas close to their own, but they also make elaborate plans for the appearance of the cenotaph: "Victory, winged, with Peace, winged too, at the column's head" (6). The people become more concerned over the cenotaph than they are about memorializing and paying respect to the dead loved ones.

Mew ends the poem addressing the true intentions of these people described as overly eager in the medium of memorializing the dead. She concludes,

For this will stand in our Market-place—

Who'll sell, who'll buy

(Will you or I

Lie each to each with the better grace)?

While looking into every busy whore's and huckster's face

As they drive their bargains, is the Face

Of God: and some young, piteous, murdered face. (19-25)

The speaker asks who is capable of buying and selling their goods next to a statue that acknowledges the life of an innocent man. The whore and the huckster both have something to sell in this marketplace. The whore is selling her body while the huckster is attempting to sell items of questionable value. Mew explains that while these two types of people are trying to make a profit in unorthodox ways, watching them is not only the

“Face of God” and the judgment of sin, but also the dead soldier that the cenotaph stands for. The cenotaph is centered in the middle of the marketplace and is meant to remind the community of the sacrifice a young man made, but instead, people, like the huckster and the whore, are completely oblivious to the monument and what it represents. Instead, they continue to lie to each other, hoping to make the profit regardless of what is at stake.

In the same way that the whore and huckster are bargaining for their products to be purchased, so was the young man bargained for his country. The difference between the soldier and the sellers is that the soldier paid the ultimate price and all that is left of his purchase is a forgotten, overlooked cenotaph of minimal recognition. Mew’s poem is anti-war literature because it illustrates the greed and selfishness of the living even when they know, subconsciously, at the least, that someone gave his life to protect the freedoms they have, just for them to try to cheat and lie. Charlotte Mew’s entire volume of poems was titled “Saturday Market.” The last poem in the collection is “The Cenotaph.” In the same way that the cenotaph is standing in the marketplace, overshadowing the actions that take place, so is “The Cenotaph” overshadowing her previous poems in the volume. It suggests that at the end of the conversation on war, there will always be the unremembered, unacknowledged man who died for his country so that others can continue living in their wicked ways. Bell explains that the poem’s “intended traditional patriotic message is subverted” because the cenotaph “serves as a reminder to the war profiteers of the ‘murder’ of hundreds of thousands of young men, and of divine justice” (193). Therefore, what good does war really bring if soldiers die and non-combatants continue living in sin?

Not only did women's war poetry comment on the various attitudes of the war, namely the heartbreak that was caused, the glory of war, and finally, the ugly reality of war, but many females recounted their personal involvement in the war. In fact, Geiger explains "WWI was one of the major catalysts that propelled women from the domestic into the public; before the war, the majority of British women were firmly 'entrenched' in their own domestic spheres" (3). In WWI, only men were allowed to participate in the infantry. No women took guns blazing to the battlefield, but many women did get the opportunity to aid in the war effort in other ways. Most commonly known as the female profession during the war was the role of a nurse. Infirmaries and first aid tents were often set up near battlefields where war took place, and if a soldier became injured, he would be rushed to the tent or hospital where a female nurse would help them. Not only did women participate in jobs as nurses, but also in other occupations such as factories where ammunition was made. Women would assemble weapons, ammunition packages, and even work on the mechanics of war vehicles like planes and tanks. Many current readers do not acknowledge the amount of work that women did in order to keep the war fueled. Especially in war literature, it is often the poetry that describes the romance and heartbreak of women waiting on their men to return home that receives the most attention. However, by looking at poems that describe the working female's experience in WWI, it is clear to see that men were not the only ones that had a huge job to fulfill.

One such poem that describes the feelings of a woman forced to see the everyday consequence of war is Alberta Vickridge's "In a V.A.D. Pantry." The V.A.D. was an acronym used for Voluntary Aid Detachment, in which volunteers of both genders would attempt to help the war effort in any way they could. In Vickridge's poem, the speaker is

most likely a woman who is working in one of the kitchens used for soldiers. She begins the first stanza by describing the kitchen scene and how the other workers are viewed.

She writes,

Pots in piles of blue and white,  
 Old in service, cracked and chipped—  
 While the bare-armed girls tonight  
 Rinse and dry, with trivial-lipped  
 Mirth, and jests, and giggling chatter,  
 In this maze of curls and clatter  
 Is there no one sees in you  
 More than common while and blue? (1-8)

The end of the first stanza not only ends with a question, but it also redirects the reader back to the first line where she describes the pots that are blue and white. In the scene being described, the atmosphere is relatively happy and joyous. The girls that are washing the dishes are laughing and chattering. Yet, the speaker realizes that the pots define who she is. Her volunteering in this pantry is all that people see in her. Maybe the speaker is questioning her individual role in the war effort or maybe she is investigating the soldier's motivations for fighting in the war, but nonetheless, the speaker believes that the war has consumed the identity of the individual. Rather than a unique human being with feelings and hopes, people only see a soldier or a war volunteer. The war has essentially hijacked the individualism of those who chose to participate.



Vickridge discusses the importance of the pots at greater length. The pots are used in an extended metaphor that compares the wear and tear of kitchenware to the stability of soldiers. The speaker asks in the second stanza:

When the potter trimmed your clay's  
 Sodden mass to his desire—  
 Washed you in the viscid glaze  
 That is clarified by fire—  
 When he sold your sort in lots,  
 Reckoning such as common pots—  
 Did he not at times foresee  
 Sorrow in your destiny? (9-16)

Essentially, the speaker asks the man who made the pot if he ever thought that the clay would become damaged in its future use. The speaker tells the reader that the pot is “old in service, cracked and chipped” (2). Yet, she wants to know if its potter ever knew it would end up like this. The practical answer would be yes. No kitchenware is expected to remain undamaged after being repeatedly used for years. Vickridge is drawing a comparison to the potter and the soldier by assuming that the soldier knew what he was getting himself into by enlisting in the war. He had to know that his life would be at risk and he had a good chance of getting seriously injured. According to the posters and other war poems mentioned earlier, maybe the men did not know what to expect in battle. Nevertheless, Vickridge introduces the question about fate in order to ascertain what causes the men that walk in from battle to risk their lives for such a cause knowing well the consequences.

In the third stanza, Vickridge moves from an extended metaphor about potters and kitchenware to one that is much more religious. The speaker captures the cruelty of war by describing the utterly exhausting state of being these men are in. Vickridge concludes the poem describing,

Lips of fever, parched for drink  
 From this vessel seek relief  
 Ah, so often, that I think  
 Many a sad Last Supper's grief  
 Haunts it still—that they who died,  
 In man's quarrel crucified,  
 Shed a nimbus strange and pale  
 Round about this humble Grail. (17-24)

The beginning of the stanza is no doubt one of the worst images in the poem. The men are thirsty from war, fighting long hours with little time or supply for a drink of water. Being shot or wounded is one type of torturous pain, but in many ways, having to go long periods of time deprived of food and water can often be just as bad. The speaker watches these soldiers come in looking for just the smallest drop of water to quench their thirst and what she sees in addition is the pain and struggle that these men are facing outside of the pantry. The speaker continues with the thought that for many of the men that walk into the pantry, the meal they eat in front of her could be the last meal they ever eat. In the same way the Last Supper preceded Jesus's conviction and crucifixion, so are these meals preceding their death outside on the battlefield.

The last five lines of the final stanza encapsulate the speaker's attitude about these men. She explains that the individuals who walk into the pantry and do not return leave behind them a "nimbus strange and pale" (23). A nimbus is defined in this context as "an indication (such as a circle) of radiant light or glory about the head of a drawn or sculptured divinity, saint, or sovereign" (Merriam-Webster). Essentially, what they leave behind them is a halo of some sort that represents their innocence or purity. Most soldiers enlisted in the war not because Pope described WWI as a fun game, but because they felt that it was the right thing to do. The country was in a massive war and the lives of their families were in danger. As a man, the need to protect and serve motivated men of all ages to fight for the grand cause. Therefore, when the speaker explains that they leave behind them a nimbus, or halo, in that pantry, she is both acknowledging their willingness to risk their lives to protect others, but also the impact it has on her. The nimbus that the man leaves behind is pale, meaning the light is not bright and shining, but faded. She refers to the pantry as a "humble Grail" (24) because while it is a place of refuge and rest, it also is not great enough to save them from the reality. It is only a temporary shelter of water and pots.

Ultimately, working in the pantry is not as easy of a job as it might appear. While it might be just a job for some, like the girls described laughing in the background, for the speaker, the pantry is a place where she meets face-to-face the people she is serving. Just by providing water or a meal to a soldier, the speaker notices the truth of war. She knows that war takes a little out of a person who once was so eager. She knows that she might not ever see that soldier again because the casualty rate is outrageously high. Overall

though, she knows that what she is doing in the V.A.D. is hard, but important work— just as the disciples helped Jesus before He was crucified.

Women were employed in a number of occupations in the war effort. Not only did women serve near the war bases helping with first aid or with hospitable accommodations, but also with the production of ammunition. Bell comments on how the job of an ammunition maker contrasted so greatly with that of a nurse, for example, in the public eye: “Because the role of the nurse was a nurturing one, public praise and commendation of war nurses was more forthcoming than for women whose war roles caused more social unease, such as munition workers” (417). It is an odd image of this era to see women create such a masculine product, a product that will kill a human being. In Mary Gabrielle Collins’ poem, “Women at Munition Making,” the language shows the mental experience of creating such destructive objects, knowing full well that the use of these will have dire consequences for some other mother’s son. She emphasizes this theme by contrasting the work of ammunition production to the common and expected job of a woman: being a mother.

Collins begins the poem describing in soft language all of the responsibilities of motherhood. The verb that begins all of the responsibilities is “should,” as if that is the intended role of the mother, but because of the circumstances, she is involuntarily pushed into doing something else. Collins writes:

Their hands should minister unto the flame of life,  
 Their fingers guide  
 The rosy teat, swelling with milk,  
 To the eager mouth of the suckling babe. (1-4)

The speaker is handling the most innocent of creatures, a baby. This image of a helpless newborn contradicts the images of war in which the enemies are portrayed as evil monsters. The baby, however, is dependent on the mother to guide him or her to the breast for the simple act of sustaining life. The soldiers in war, on the other hand, are completely independent adults. Other than their comrades, there is no person that the soldier can rely on for their life. Collins is essentially suggesting that the mother should be occupied with providing the newborn child his or her life, but instead, she is now responsible for making a product that could end a life.

Collins changes the tone of the poem by introducing the experience of building ammunition. She describes,

But now,  
 Their hands, their fingers  
 Are coarsened in munition factories.  
 Their thoughts, which should fly  
 Like bees among the sweetest mind flowers  
 Gaining nourishment for the thoughts to be,  
 Are bruised against the law,  
 “Kill, kill.”

They must take part in defacing and destroying the natural body. (10-18)

In a complete contrast with the maternal images of the first section of the poem, the mothers' actions are no longer described as soft and tender, but rather, coarse and tough. Even the mentality of the women has changed. No longer do they possess kind and sweet thoughts of nurturing and hospitality; now their thoughts are engrossed with the war. The

last two lines in this section are the most crucial in the poem. The women are indirectly aiding injuring or killing rather than offering healing or giving succor. Their involvement is indirect, which may be for the best. They have no knowledge of exactly who the bullets that they are making will end up killing; they could all end up being strays that cause no injury. But the intention behind the production of such tools of death is still significant. The bullets they are making have the potential to kill another mother's son, and there is no doubt that many of these women, being mothers, are going to have to bear the burden of heavy emotional and psychological turmoil.

In the final section of the poem, the speaker suggests that God has watched human conflict since the beginning of time. Up until WWI, there was little need for women to be involved in the makings and doings of war. They served as nurses or as auxiliary members, but they did not work in munitions factories or help to create objects that would serve death rather than life. But the advent of mechanized warfare and the huge scale of such an endeavor called for women—in order to save their own sons—to become complicit in killing the sons of other mothers. Although this change in complexity and scale is new, there is still something atavistic about it. Collins explains that a long enough perspective on the history of human warfare will reduce even this new level of engagement to its essential function, the destruction of that which God has created:

O God!

Throughout the ages we have seen,

Again and again

Men by Thee created

Cancelling each other.

And we have marveled at the seeming annihilation

Of Thy work. (21-27)

Collins comments on the consistent patterns of war. The war that the women are in is conceptually no different than any other war that has ever been fought. Men have been and still are killed by other men. Historically, women have been bystanders to such undertakings; they stand outside the event itself and marvel at it. However, now they are engaged in the killing, and Collins notes the trauma caused by such a reversal of women's traditional wartime roles. Despite their monumental aid to the war effort, these "women munitions workers were seen as, at best, a necessary wartime evil" (Bell 424). The speaker is aware of these perceptions of her new status, and Collins emphasizes throughout the poem how unnatural it is for women to be participating in such a destructive occupation.

For the speaker, the circumstances of WWI are much worse than the war-time conditions of the past, because now women are in some way partially responsible for the bloodshed. Collins concludes the poem thus:

But this goes further,

Taints the fountain head,

Mounts like a poison to the Creator's very heart.

O God!

Must It anew be sacrificed on earth? (28-32)

Here Collins suggests that WWI is really the worst war that history has ever produced. Because of the advanced technology used and the number of combatants involved, the

number of casualties in WWI was greater than in any previous Western war. And women, forced from the sidelines to these new support positions, got a first-hand look into the realities of war. This obviously religious speaker calls out to God, asking to understand the seemingly inevitable human drive to destroy what God has created. Women were created to give and support life, raise and protect children, feed them when they're hungry, and nurse them when they're sick. But now they are responsible for making weapons that will kill those children, beings that God himself created. What would be needed to undo this process? Must women return to their original roles in order that the conflict of war be resolved?

Ultimately, WWI saw an unprecedented outpouring of women's poetry. For most of the history of the Western world, women were shielded from the realities of war, arguably for good reasons. Women prior to this global conflict maintained their roles as wives and mothers after the men went away to fight. Yet now, a woman's voice is crucial to the genre of war poetry because she now has experiences that differ from those in any other war. It is one thing for women to have a position on the war while their communities were affected and their husbands, fathers, and sons were abroad fighting for their country. But it is a far more central matter when women are directly involved in the war through their own actions. Women, though not on the battlefield, played a crucial role in the war effort, and for that fact alone, their voices are well validated in the genre of war poetry.

In conclusion, the first world war was a unique era in global history. The magnitude of death was unpredicted and the opinions concerning the war across nations were varied. The propaganda posters not only illustrate the different ways nations



attempted to encourage men to enlist, but they also show the role of the female and how that strategy impacted voluntary enlistments. Men were encouraged to fight on behalf of the helpless woman, who could not protect themselves against the savage enemy. Men were also encouraged to join the war because maybe for the first time in the history of wars, their masculinity was being questioned. According to the propaganda only a *real* man would be eager to enlist in the war. It was a man's duty to protect his country and his family. Given all the ploys to build a nation's army, the woman might have been one of the most successful and popular technique to lure men to participate in the deadliness of WWI.

While poster propaganda that included women swept across the country, the same cannot be said for women's war poetry as a whole. In fact, if any poems were circulated widely, the poems were usually about a woman's love, separation, and anxiety for a departed man. While this genre of female war poetry is just as important as any other, women wrote other poems about the war that demonstrated attitudes besides love and passion. Women wrote poems about how the men in their lives ought to join the war effort because it was an opportunity to show one's nationalism and patriotism. Others explained how war was a falsely glorified hoax that brought death and destruction rather than honor and pride. Finally, a large percentage of women were involved in the war effort for the first time. This participation created a new genre of war poetry, written by those who volunteered to help the war effort in various capacities. Though women were not of one consensus when it came to attitudes about the war, these multiple voices and stances all offer important "outsider" perspectives on the general nature of war.

For many, the poems analyzed above are most likely unknown or, at the least, unfamiliar. The average academic is well-versed in the male poets of the same era. Poets like Owen, Sassoon, Brooke, and Rosenberg are all common names taught in the classroom. There is not a pressing need to analyze the poetry of these poets because there is already so much written on them. Santanu Das writes, “We seldom read such poetry; it is usually a matter of re-reading, remembering, returning – with familiarity, surprise, sometimes resistance” (British Library). Plain and simple, the men are acknowledged and respected more as war poets than women. In fact, the poetry of women has been so overlooked that reference books fail to acknowledge them. *The Oxford Handbook: The Great War in Modernist Poetry* does not list one female poet.

Some critics will argue that the woman’s voice is not as validated as the man’s voice. After all, the woman did not experience first-hand the brutality, pain, and fatality that the man did. In fact, Bell comments on how men looked down upon the voice of the woman because of her absence from actual combat: “In the 1920s and 1930s, as the British began to discuss and remember the war publicly, the writings of the ‘soldier poets’ (including Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Siegfried Sassoon) began to be published in Britain. Their popularly acclaimed poems celebrated the brotherhood of the shared experience of the front and emphasized the ignorance and unworthiness of women compared to soldiers” (415). Essentially, women’s war poetry was second tier to men’s because it simply lacked the true perspective of war. However, just because a woman did not march with the army, kill the enemy with her rifle, or watch her fellow soldier die in the trenches next to her does not mean that her voice is not as real and important. In the same way the woman lacked perspective that the man had, so did the man lack

perspective that the female had. The man did not know what it felt like to watch his partner or mother or daughter walk away to join the war effort and never know if he was going to see her again. He didn't know what it felt like to create ammunition for the first time in male history and know that it was going to kill some other father's daughter. The role reversals in this scenario sound unreasonable, but the point stands. The man and the woman had different insights into what war was and both perspectives are equally validated in the genre of war poetry.

Maria Geiger states in "No Trench Required: Validating the Voices of Female Poets of WWI" that "women were close enough to battle to be considered 'in the know,' which seems to be the prerequisite for entry into the WWI canon" (1). She explains that women's war poetry is not included in this canon because it is less inferior compared to the male, but rather because of the continuation of "that other 'Old Lie' that keeps women's poetry out of the WWI canon—the one that perpetuates the ideology that the only WWI poetry of value is that which was written by those with first-hand experience of battle" (1). Essentially, Geiger provides the widespread consensus that women's war poetry is viewed as less valuable because the women did not actually fight in the war and witness the realities of war, yet she counteracts this notion by calling it the "Old Lie." What makes poetry have value is that it offers a perspective that is unique to the individual and informative to the reader. The female voice is just as validated because it does both. Without their writing from outside the trench, there would be little information regarding the attitudes of women during the war and the coverage of WWI would be extremely androcentric.

Critics now often argue that there is a clear distinction between war poetry and trench poetry. One might assume that only trench poetry is worthy of being recognized as war poetry because after all, it does contain the most face-to-face truths of war from writers who saw it first-hand. However, to say that trench poetry is the most accurate or most valued is rejecting history of a plethora of informative, meaningful, and important poems that represent WWI. Trench poetry should only be regarded as a subgenre of war poetry. Women who wrote poems from the home front or from the ammunition factories are just as accurately justifying their attitudes about the war even if they were not writing from the trenches on the battlefield. After acknowledging and analyzing the above mentioned poetry written by females, it is made clear that poetry written by women during WWI is capable of its own subgenre of war poetry that is equal to trench poetry written by men. Malvern Smith confirms, “war poetry is not only verse written by men who are or have been under fire ... it is also the work of observers at home as much as that of soldiers at the Front” (ix).

Thus, women’s voices in the Great War are not to be ignored or refuted because of their distance from the battlefield. In fact, their voices deserve as much recognition as the voices of their male counterparts, namely Owen, Sassoon, and Rosenberg. Women were not just the lovers, the worriers, and the mourners, but were strong and brave themselves, participating not only in the political realm of the war, but also in the physical labor of the war effort as well. Whether nurses or ammunition workers, women were valued contributors to the war effort and their voices deserve our attention. I argue that today, in the midst of campaigns for female equality and multiple outlets for women’s previously-silenced voices to be heard, we should take note of the past and

address and omission that has long been neglected: listening to the perspectives of both genders. As a result, readers will understand how views from marginalized perspectives— the onlookers, of whatever stripe, and the multitudes of factory workers, V.A.D. aides, nurses, and other volunteers— comprise an insightful treasure chest that offers a legacy of both feminine courage and poetic craft.

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